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SERVICE

USDA'S REPORT TO CONSUMERS

Reserve

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SELECT VEGETABLES

In Good Taste. When vegetables are on the menu, most people take corn, potatoes, or tomatoes. According to USDA's Economic Research Service, almost everyone likes the taste of these three vegetables. Asparagus, Brussels sprouts, eggplant, okra, and turnips rank lowest on the taste scale. In a survey of consumer attitudes that affect purchase and use of vegetables, ERS found that taste counts the most. A vegetable may be high in nutrition and easy to prepare, but unless the homemaker and other family members like its taste, it is not likely to appear very often on the dinner table. Homemakers associated fresh vegetables more than canned or frozen with good taste, vitamin and mineral content, appetizing appearance, versatility, appealing color, availability in stores (when in season), quality and texture. Canned vegetables ranked ahead of fresh and frozen for ease of storage and preparation, keeping well before cooking, a good value for the money, and low cost per serving. Frozen vegetables were associated more often with lack of waste than either canned or fresh vegetables.

FUEL AND FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Power And Production. There are many practical reasons for conserving gasoline and other energy resources. A new USDA slide set and filmstrip urges conservation of energy for one of the most practical of reasons: To assure farmers a dependable supply of fuel and energy to meet the food needs for this country. "Fuel For Food" stresses the critical need farmers have for a constant energy supply throughout the food and fiber production cycle--fuels to run tractors, to keep baby chicks warm, to make fertilizers for crop production. It is designed to help consumers understand the relationship between the amount of energy they use in their daily routine and the amount needed to grow their food supply. The 94-frame slide set can be purchased for \$25 from the Photography Division, Office of Communication, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250. The filmstrip is \$11.50 from the Photo Lab, Inc., 3825 Georgia Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20011. Prices include two copies of an illustrated narrative guide and a soundtrack on cassette pulsed with both 1,000 Hz and 50 Hz signals to change slide automatically.



SUMMER FOOD PREVIEW

Lower prices on the farm are easing pressures on food prices at the retail store for summer. Prices for livestock have plunged from high levels of winter; crop prices have also dipped. At the same time, inflation has cut into our buying power, and demand from consumers, especially for meat and other costlier foods, appears to have slackened at the supermarket.

But inflation works in the opposite direction, too. Costs are up sharply throughout the food industry for labor, fuel, packaging, transportation, and many other items. These higher costs are offsetting much of the potential benefit to consumers of lower farm prices. Take beef prices: For each pound we bought in May, USDA figures that farmers got 84 cents, 9 cents less than in May 1973. Yet we paid an average of \$1.35, only 1 cent less than a year before.

Following rises at the beginning of the year, average food prices since March have stayed on a fairly even level. Customers should see food prices averaging about the same level or only slightly higher than they are now through the summer.

This spring U.S. beef and pork supplies were a tenth larger than a year ago. Storage coolers around the country are carrying substantially more red meats and poultry. Meanwhile, caught between sky-high costs and dropping prices for their product, livestock men have been getting rid of some stock. A big flow of meat has poured onto the market.

Look for beef and pork price specials for a while longer. Then, as the overflow dries up this summer, red meat prices are likely to edge up a little. Lamb prices, which shot up this spring, may level off and perhaps even drop during the summer.

There is plenty of poultry on hand. Prices are down sharply from last year -- down so far, in fact, that poultry producers are making little or nothing on their birds and eggs, and are likely to trim output this summer. Even so, with plenty of meat and diminished consumer interest, prices won't be much higher than they were in spring: Broiler prices could rise a little; turkeys should stay about where they are now; and egg prices will be up some from the bargain prices of late spring.

Shoppers will find prices staying about the same at the dairy cooler on the average. Last year, a switch to cheese as a budget-balancer brought higher cheese prices. Now, with meat more plentiful, and larger cheese supplies, cheese prices are coming down. Butter prices have fallen already, and may drop a little more. Whole milk prices have stopped their climb, and should level out or even drop some this summer.

You will also find lower potato prices than last winter and spring. A good spring crop has brought lower prices for fresh potatoes. Look for prices to maintain their current lower level until mid-September when harvest of the big fall potato crop could send prices lower still.

At the vegetable counter, summer means 'fresh' and 'local'. Stores will be featuring locally grown tomatoes, sweet corn, and other items. And, judging by trade reports of record sales of vegetable seed packets and plants this spring, many more families will be vegetable shopping in their own back yards this summer.

As home gardeners can or freeze their produce, the food industry will be working around the clock to put up supplies of processed fruits and vegetables. Be prepared to pay higher prices as these new packs arrive at your store this fall. They will be priced to reflect steep cost increases affecting both the farmers who grew the crops and the firms that put them up.

Frozen fruit and vegetables are in good supply. There were some fairly large 'off-season' vegetable packs this spring. So check your frozen food department for frozen broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, and spinach, as well as strawberries, blueberries, and peaches.

Canners' stocks of noncitrus fruit items are unusually low, but large packs of cling peaches and Bartlett pears will bolster supplies later this year. However, supplies of canned citrus items are a little larger than last year, and the price of frozen orange juice will stay about where it is. For fresh citrus fruit, the smaller orange and grapefruit supplies mean higher prices this summer than last year.

You'll find fresh plums and nectarines priced no higher than last summer, thanks to larger crops this year. On the other than, prices for pears, apricots, and peaches will be up from last year. California has produced plenty of peaches, but smaller crops will be picked in the East and South this season.

Prices for major food imports -- sugar, coffee, cocoa, and bananas -- are all up. Coffee and cocoa have been higher priced for the past year, reflecting tight world supplies. Sugar's rise has been recent and rapid, and will probably continue into the summer. A complex of foreign and domestic factors affects both sugar and banana prices.

THE HOUSE OR LA CASA

Loan Information For Either. USDA's Farmers Home Administration recently issued some new pamphlets and fact sheets describing the agency's major loan programs. Seven of the pamphlets and two of the fact sheets have been translated into Spanish: "Resource Conservation and Development" (PA-799-S); "Home Ownership" (PA-977-S); "This Is FHA" (PA-973-S); "Rural Rental Housing" (PA-1039-S); "Self-Help Housing" (PA-990-S); "Rural Housing Repairs" (PA-1058-S); "Operating Loans" (PA-1002-S); and fact sheets "Community Facilities" and "Emergency Loans." Copies of the publications in either Spanish or English, as well as information concerning other Farmers Home Administration programs, can be obtained free from any of the 1,750 local county FmHA offices throughout the nation or by writing to the Information Division, Farmers Home Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

FHA Is Now FmHA. Another 'new' item from the Farmers Home Administration is the 'm' in their initials. The little letter was officially added recently to avoid a long-time confusion between the USDA agency and two other FHA's: Federal Housing Administration and Federal Highway Administration.

CONSIDER A TREE

For Shade, Beauty, and Money. Developers of residential properties often consider trees a mixed blessing. Trees create beauty, shade, habitats for birds -- and leaves to rake and possible damage to pipes and paving. A recent study by USDA's Forest Service has added another factor when deciding to destroy or preserve trees on land being developed: Trees in the yard may mean money in the bank. The study was conducted by a Forest Service environmental researcher, first among realtors and then among homeowners. Both groups were asked to estimate selling prices of houses architecturally similar but with different amounts of trees and shrubs surrounding them. Both groups gave similar estimates, assigning higher values to houses surrounded by more trees. The study concluded that trees may increase the market value of a residential property by as much as 20 percent, with an average increase of 5 to 10 percent. Before you rush out to plant a tree, you might want to check out some of USDA's booklets on tree plantings. They are available for sale from the Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. To mention three: "Trees For Shade and Beauty" (G-117; 25 cents a copy); "Selecting and Growing Shade Trees" (G-205; 30 cents a copy); and "Trees For Polluted Air" (MP-1230; 25 cents per copy).

URBAN MOSQUITOS

A Grave Problem. An urban area's major source of mosquitoes may well be harbored within the quiet serenity of its cemeteries. Flower vases and urns placed in cemeteries make excellent mosquito hatcheries. When wilted flowers are not discarded and their vases removed or turned upside down, water in the containers often becomes mosquito breeding grounds. Artificial flowers pose even more of a problem. They are more permanent and their vases remain out longer to collect water from rainfall and sprinklers. Scientists of USDA's Agricultural Research Service have devised a method which controls vase-bred mosquitoes, one that completely eliminates the need for insecticides. Finding that mosquitoes will not lay eggs on water that has a small surface area, the scientists placed grids with spacings of various sizes into cemetery vases. Mosquitoes did not lay any egg masses in vases holding grids with 1/2-inch spacings. Grids of 3/4-inch spacings showed a 95 percent reduction in egg masses while 1-inch spacings proved totally ineffective. Besides thwarting mosquitoes, the grids made it easier to arrange flowers in the vases.

SERVICE is a monthly newsletter of consumer interest. It is designed for those who report to the individual consumer rather than for mass distribution. For information about items in this issue, write: Lillie Vincent, Editor of SERVICE, Office of Communication, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250. Telephone (202) 447-5437.
